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582 208 married in Dragalevtsy. Because she had a physical deformity her parents had given up all hope of marrying her off since they knew she would be unable to attend properly to her housework and field work. During the first World War there were two old maids in the village who had not been chosen for marriage because each of them had a goiter. A doctor with the German forces cured the goiters [554] and these two unmarried women became desirable prospects, one of them marrying a priest's son in Sofia, one of the highest prizes a village girl could capture in her matrimonial venture.

[208] Since public opinion made life miserable for unmarried women, [562] even a girl of independent temperament looked upon marriage as an inevitable event, especially if she stayed in the village. With men it 581 was different. They could choose to remain unmarried and not lose prestige in the community. People only said: "Well, Asen simply doesn't want to marry. He's a bit shy of skirts, you know."

The young men to whom I talked were outspoken in regard to those qualities which they looked for in choosing a mate: good health, industry, efficiency in the house and field, and proper care of the person. The girls, on the other hand, had little to say regarding the qualities they wanted in a husband. They seemed willing to accept whatever luck brought them. But marry they must.

584 574 883 There were many ways in which the husbands and wives had become acquainted with each other. If both had been born in Dragalevtsy, as was the case with a little more than half the couples, they were already aware of the other's characteristics either through personal acquaintance or hearsay. Many of the married couples had played together as children while tending the cattle in the sun-drenched pastures, only to become distant until most of the adolescent period passed. Then began frequent meetings at the fountain at sunset, shy flirtation at the *horo* and *sedenki*, or rambling conversation on the way to and from the Friday market. At the *sedenki*, held by the young people in various girls' homes on winter evenings, games involving forfeits were played. At one *sedenka* I attended, the girl giving out the penalties sent a couple obviously in love to the dark outdoors "to see what the weather was like." A few minutes later she sent a second couple out to see where the first had gone. All four of the

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young people came back giggling with excitement. Only in some rare instances had shyness kept the young couple apart in the village until matchmaking elders brought them together on the wedding day.

Old and young alike agreed as to the importance of the *sedenka* as a boy-meet-girl occasion. Even some of the intelligentsia with a nostalgia for the simplicity of their early years in the village talked fondly of these groups in which young people whiled away many hours in common work and merriment. The *sedenka* was the Bulgarian counterpart of our pioneer cornhusking and quilting bee. There, romance as it existed in the hearts of the peasant boys and girls came to the surface and was expressed in such simple acts as the giving of a flower, the kissing of a hand or cheek. These groups, which met in fall and winter, consisted early in the evening only of girls who had been especially invited by the hostess one or two days ahead of time. Two or three hours before the *sedenka* was to begin the girl doing the entertaining had to put on her heavy *kozhuh* and again tour the neighborhood to extend a formal invitation to each guest. When the girls had gathered they immediately began to spin, since work was the pretext for coming together. Sometimes the guests brought their own work, and sometimes they assisted the hostess in carding or spinning her wool. If spinning was the order of the evening, each girl was supposed to average about a pound of rather coarse thread.

As the door was usually locked after the girls were inside, the boys, whose arrival was announced by the barking dogs, had to knock for admittance. The hostess then asked who was knocking, and one of the boys told his name.

"The girls and even the hostess know with which boys he associates and if there is any one of them who is undesirable to some or all the girls, then none of the boys is allowed to enter. Usually, however, if they open to the boys, they will open to all; but if they are not in a good mood [very rarely] then they do not open to any."

A gust of cold, fresh air accompanied the boys' entrance, and activities inside ceased until they had made the rounds, shaking hands with those present. After much squeezing and adjusting each boy found a place to sit, usually next to the girl known to be his favorite.

The coming of the boys might or might not stop the work. Quite

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The coming of the boys might not stop the work.[2] Quite
584 often the girls were able to accomplish a great deal in spite of the
574 boys, but usually the entertainment which began soon after the boys
883 arrived distracted the girls from their task. There was much singing.
533 Someone struck up an old ballad and others joined in. Then, after a few more ballads, someone ventured a popular song. I once asked a young woman whether she ever sang any modern songs (knowing well enough that she did). She replied:

"Yes, the Dragalevtsy girls know almost all the popular songs. They hear the boys singing them on the street or at *sedenki* and then ask some boy who is a relative to write down the words. If they see that the song is not appropriate, they will not sing it. They always learn the words of songs and never whistle or 'murmur' [hum]."

I wondered to what extent the patriotic songs in the school were replacing the folk songs. Here is what informants at one *sedenka* said:

"As soon as a girl leaves the school, she does not sing any of the songs learned in school, but starts singing again the old songs that she has learned from the old people. The boys, however, continue to sing the songs, chiefly military, learned in school."

No instrumental music was taught in the school, but the radio was beginning to have some effect on the peasants' choice of music. One man listened to the radio fifteen days, stopping almost all other activity, in order to get the words of a jazz song then popular. These he sang with great gusto to his admiring friends. Many of the young people were becoming ashamed of the old songs and told me that they were out of date. The new popular songs that they learned were contained in *Pesnopoiki* (songbooks) bought for a few cents on market days.

[535] The singing of some particularly lively tune at the evening gath-
584 erings[2] might lead to folk-dancing in which both the boys and the
888 girls took part. The very foundations of the house seemed to shake as the feet shuffled in time to the music. Parlor games of various sorts, quite similar to those played at a rural church social in America, were frequently played at these *sedenki*. This meant that the girls laid aside their spinning entirely and what started out as a work-bee became entirely a social gathering.

1 [= The "sedenka", or "spinning party", the Bulgarian part of an American pioneer corn husking and quilting bee -- Analyst]

2 "sedenki" -- Analyst]

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Usually after midnight, the singing at the *sedenka* began to decrease in volume, conversation became dull, and the boys sensed that it was time to go. After their departure the hostess often served refreshments such as a soggy cheese pie *(banitsa)*, and the girls might or might not spend the night. The courting aspect of the gathering was emphasized by the fact that none of the married people of the household, except the mother of the girl acting as hostess, could be present. Even she was absent much of the time in some of the homes.

It was at these *sedenki* that I collected a number of village proverbs, which were a real conversational aid to young people somewhat tongue-tied in mixed company.

"A kind word opens an iron gate."

"God gives but does not drive into the stall."

"A wet person is not afraid of rain."

"Listen much, speak little."

"Short are the legs of a lie."

"Stretch out your feet according to your quilt."

"I am telling your daughter so that daughter-in-law may hear [speaking indirectly]."

"After the rain, a raincape."

"Every pear has a stem."

"Give advice freely but not money."

"The thirsty carry water."

"A dog that barks much puts a wolf in the stall."

Within recent years the *vecherinki* provided young people other means of getting acquainted. The purpose of a *vecherinka*, or evening entertainment in the schoolhouse, was not to get any work done, but to raise money for some worthy cause. The villagers bought tickets to a program of music or drama, provided by both imported and local talent. Auctions and lotteries were features of most *vecherinki*. After the program was over the people joined in dancing: first, for an hour or so, they danced the native *hora*, to be followed, when the old folks

[1] [A "sedenka" is a spinning party – The Bulgarian part of an American pioneer husking and quilting bee – Analyst]

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went home, by village versions of western dances. It was a strange sensation on these occasions to see fifty young people trying to do the fox trot, when it was obvious that not more than five couples were experienced at it. But those who knew were patient with the novices. The excited faces were flushed not with the interest in learning a new step but rather with the daring of the dance's embrace. I asked quite a few of my acquaintances how they felt about these dances. Most of the older people who had seen the modern dances and many of the younger people considered them very immoral. In the words of one of these conservatives, "The boys especially are eager to learn a modern dance so that they can do very immoral things, which are very sweet for the young."

Although these evening entertainments had less importance in the social life of the people than the *sedenki* or the promenade, the villagers were proud of them as a formal medium of recreation in imitation of what one would find in a city. It was a new experience for many men to buy a ticket and be shown a seat; and such new experiences were dear to a peasant heart if they did not take him too far away from the ordinary world in which he moved. The first *vecherinka* was given in 1925. The teachers after that tried to give one or two more, but no one attended, so the practice was discontinued. In 1930, however, the *Chitalishte* (Reading Room Association) started them again, with the result that in the following years four or five were held during a winter.

Another innovation which played an important part in Dragalevtsy courtship was the Sunday afternoon promenade, which had displaced the traditional Sunday *horo*. The promenade course extended from Renaissance Square up a rocky street which bends to the left for a quarter of a mile. Here the young people in their Sunday best turned about and retraced their steps to the Square. One reason for the popularity of the promenade was its modernity; another was the absence of a church ban against it during Lent in contrast to the traditional interruption of *hora* during that seven-week period.

Even in the promenade there was no pairing off except in the case of some engaged couple. Indeed, walking in a twosome was tantamount to announcing an engagement. So village boys in twos,

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threes, and fours passed village girls locked arm in arm; appropriate (and inappropriate) comments were made as they passed. Up and down they went, greeting each other again and again, joking, blushing, laughing heartily, each wondering at the impression made upon some favorite member of the opposite sex.

These modern ways contrasted sharply with the laconic statements of those villagers who had married many years ago.

"When we grew older we began to know each other more intimately and went together for two or three years."

"We were neighbors before marriage. We met every holiday at the *horo* and in the evenings at the fountain. Our wedding festivities lasted three days."

"My wife and I knew one another as children. Outsiders urged both of us to marry, so I stole her. She would not agree to marry me until after I had stolen her."

Often the relatives of the couple involved kept saying that it would be a good thing to have the two persons married, and thus brought about a match they considered advantageous.

In Dragalevtsy human nature asserted itself in universal forms; for example, a village Lothario boasted:

"I had had thirty-five girls, and had gone 'hand-in-hand' with one for two years. But I fell in love with my wife because she was modest and had not talked to boys."

I might add here that the parents of the girl objected to the match, but only because she was taller than her suitor.

Two-fifths of the Dragalevtsy-born men, in their search for a wife, preferred the novelty that other villages afforded. More often than not a Bulgarian youth would all of a sudden get a fixed idea in his mind, "I've got to get a wife." The search was then under way. In such a state of mind the young man was not apt to wander far. The villages in their order of popularity were Boyana, Simeonovo, and Bistritsa. Only two other villages had more than four representatives among the married women. These likewise were not far away. It was significant that no man born in Dragalevtsy and currently living there had a wife born in Sofia. This meant that if a Sofia-

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581 born girl should marry a Dragalevtsy boy, she would make him get a job in Sofia and would not return with him to village life.

When a husband and wife born in different villages told their stories I once more began to believe in the improbable. These are typical accounts:

"I went to Kumaritsa to carry my sister's things since her husband was working at the railroad station. We stopped at a house where a niece was living with her uncle. When she heard that people from another village were at her house, she returned and found that she liked me and I liked her. We were both seventeen. Half a year later we married, during which time I came to see her only once. That means we had seen each other twice before we married."

"I met my wife when she was with her father selling onions near the Sofia *Obshtina*. This was on a Friday; the next day I went to get her from her village the other side of Sofia; the following day we were married in Dragalevtsy. The father agreed to this for I seemed to be her destiny."

● 584 The choice of a mate was not just an individual decision in Dragalevtsy, for the pressure on the part of relatives was steady and occasionally severe. At times the young people rebelled at this guidance but generally acquiesced, largely because they were so economically dependent upon their families. There were no professional matchmakers. In their stead some interested relative would take a hand at getting a daughter married off by seeing that a fitting young man was made conscious of the young woman's qualifications. This was often done so skillfully that the young man thought he had discovered the girl himself. In the 1930's the choice had to seem to originate with the young people, and there were few cases of families forcing their children into a marriage.

583 There were times when girls did marry against their will, but this was not because of parental command. These cases occurred when the bride was stolen without her consent. The actual stealing usually took place in the evening or late afternoon when the young man, assisted by companions, carried the girl from the fountain or the *horo* to his home. The girl's father was supposed immediately to hurry to the boy's home to ask if his daughter was willing to stay. The girl

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second marriages were entered into because of convenience and necessity. But such tolerance was not shown to the previously unmarried. 587 837

In Dragalevtsy children married according to age, the oldest first. If a younger child wanted to marry before his brother, he had to buy permission, but in no case was a son or daughter supposed to have the customary wedding celebration before an older sister married, the only chance being an elopement followed by a very simple ceremony. 582

Most girls and men in Dragalevtsy married between the twentieth and the twenty-fifth year. At the time of the last census (1934) there were only one married man and eighteen married women under twenty. Men had begun to marry later than they had ten years before, although there seemed to be no such well-defined trend for the women.

Since marriage was the normal channel for sex expression, an enamored couple thought readily of a wedding. When they reached an understanding, they considered themselves engaged and sought parental approval. Of the thirty representative families that I studied, eighteen, or more than half, were engaged one week. Only two couples were engaged for longer than two weeks. 584

The engagement did not grant the couple any privileges of intimacy; indeed, the boy was not allowed to visit with the girl until the wedding. His sisters and relatives went to call upon her, or, if she had been stolen and was in his home, his parents kept the girl away from him until the day of the wedding. Therefore, the engagement period did not give the young couple any chance of getting better acquainted; it simply gave the families an opportunity to prepare for the wedding a week later. Whenever a wedding was to take place, someone usually sent a message to me at the College, and if possible I attended. As a foreigner I was attracted to those customs that were bizarre; so to offset this I persuaded three peasants of different ages and from different families to give me separately a complete description of the typical wedding. This showed me which points they thought most important and served as a check to my observations.

A wedding was a village affair, the parents of the girl inviting all of those who had previously invited them as well as those whose invitations they would like to receive. This meant the laying in of large 585

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585 quantities of wine and *rakiya*, the hiring of musicians from Sofia, and the baking of many pies and loaves of bread. Of course, the women of the neighborhood shared in the excitement by helping both the parents of the bride and of the groom.

Before the church service all of the young people who could find a wagon went to the bride's house, and after certain formalities took her possessions to the home of the groom. The bony horses raced around the curves in a cloud of dust while the boys cracked whips and shot guns. The procession to the church went first to the home of the godparents, a point of special honor, then to the home of the groom, and finally to that of the bride. As in America, there was room for great variety in wedding procedures, according to the amount of money the families could afford to spend.

431 584 Another important aspect of a village wedding was the custom of presenting important guests with some sort of garment. The groom's family gave a shirt, a belt, or a handkerchief to each of its close relatives, but the bride had to have something ready for the relatives of both families. When she was eight or nine years old she began preparing these numerous presents, doing them all by hand. In return she received a small sum of money from each person she honored. [574] At the first weddings I attended I failed, through ignorance of the custom, to live up to my part of the bargain, but that seemed to make no difference in the way the people felt toward me. They never came to remind me of the oversight, because with natural courtesy they did not want to make me, a guest, feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. One evening when I was visiting one of the families I knew best, I asked a twenty-year-old girl to show me her hope chest containing the presents that she intended to give away as well as those garments that she planned to keep for her own use. This is what the chest contained:

25 pairs of socks knitted by the girl
55 long white shirts of homespun cloth (half to be given away)
35 homespun belts to be given to unmarried men
15 face towels
15 headkerchiefs worn by married women
20 *sukmani*, or black jumper dresses (most to be kept by the girl)

This girl was by no means from a rich household.

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TABLE 7

LENGTH OF ENGAGEMENT PERIOD, DRAGALEVTSY, 1935*

No engagement	1 couple
"Short"	3 couples
1 day	1 couple
3 days	1 couple
1 week	18 couples
10 days	1 couple
2 weeks	3 couples
6 weeks	1 couple
8 weeks	1 couple

* Information gotten from people selected at random. They were of varying ages and had been married for varying periods of time.

B. TABLES ABOUT THE FARMS

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TABLE 8

SIZE OF HOLDINGS OF DRAGALEVTSY FARMERS, WITH NUMBER ENTIRELY OWNED, CENSUS OF 1926*

SIZE OF HOLDING (DECARES†)	NUMBER OF FARMS	TOTAL DECARES	NUMBER OF FARMS OWNED	TOTAL DECARES OWNED
0- 10	12	35.2	11	32.2
10- 20	14	237.5	14	237.5
20- 30	27	674.9	26	654.6
30- 40	32	1,147.1	29	1,048.4
40- 50	21	947.3	21	947.3
50- 60	24	1,319.4	22	1,206.3
60- 70	17	1,104.0	17	1,104.0
70- 80	19	1,429.8	17	1,276.7
80- 90	7	589.7	7	589.7
90-100	7	657.3	7	657.3
100-150	37	4,300.2	34	3,950.6
150-200	13	2,191.8	13	2,191.8
200-300	2	492.7	2	492.7
Total	232	15,126.9	220	14,388.6
Per cent owned			94.8	95.1

* Monastery farm of 1,176.1 decares omitted from table.
† 1 decare is ¼ acre.